



Project  
**MUSE**®

*Scholarly journals online*

# *Transforming Monumental Landscapes in Late Antique Egypt: Monastic Dwellings in Legal Documents from Western Thebes*

---

ELISABETH R. O'CONNELL

The conversion of temples into churches may offer the most vivid portrayal of cultural transformation in the architectural environment of late antique Egypt; however, the landscape was arguably more radically reworked when early Christian ascetics adapted earlier funerary architecture to domestic and other purposes. The rich archaeological remains of late sixth-eighth century Western Thebes, together with literary texts concerning the region's inhabitants, allow us to explore the practical and ideological implications of adaptive reuse of funerary architecture in a single circumscribed region. This paper concentrates on the vocabulary of space used in one genre of legal documents unearthed at Western Thebes. Wills (διαθήκαι) describe monastic property located in the region and offer one point of access by which we may explore how the region's inhabitants understood their monumental landscape.

Antony went out to the tombs (μνήματα/μῆλαγ) that were situated some distance from the village. He charged one of his friends to supply him periodically with bread, and he entered one of the tombs (μνήματα/μῆλαγ) and remained alone within, his friend having closed the door on him.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to thank the following for their encouragement and suggestions on drafts of this paper: Susanna Elm, Jon Frey, James Goehring, Peter Grossmann, Todd Hickey, James Keenan, Cathleen Keller, Maria Mavroudi, Josephine Quinn, and, especially, Kristina Sessa and the anonymous *J ECS* referee. All errors of fact and judgment remain my own.

1. VA 8 (SC 400; CSCO/Copt 117). Translation from Robert C. Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 37–38.

Having got to know the courage of the old man Apa Palamon, young Pachomius made it a habit to leave his cell and to go to the tombs (μῆλαγ) filled with dead [bodies] and to pass the whole night there, praying before the Lord Jesus from evening to morning.<sup>2</sup>

Antony and Pachomius, the “fathers” of anchoritic and coenobitic monasticism respectively, are both depicted as spending time in tombs during their early disciplines. Their early *Lives* can be read as progressions toward the places that would come to be identified with their respective models of monasticism: Antony’s inner desert and Pachomius’s walled community.<sup>3</sup> The *Lives* of both saints represent tombs as temporary stopping-places on the way to their final destinations. But Egyptian archaeological remains depict a situation far less transient. As Egyptologists know, monks regularly adopted the great necropoleis of ancient Egypt as long-term earthly residences. Traces of their habitations dot the Middle and Upper Egyptian landscape, wherever tombs and mortuary temples lay open along the desert escarpment.<sup>4</sup>

Adaptive reuse of funerary architecture was one widely practiced option for ascetic dwelling, not only in the early development of the movement, but throughout late antiquity.<sup>5</sup> Some of Egypt’s best-preserved late antique monasteries developed out of necropoleis inhabited by well-known ascetics. For example, the Monastery of Apa Jeremias (Sakkara) and Deir Anba Hadra (Aswan) both underwent a process of centralization and enclosure in the sixth century, and over time the tombs were overwhelmed with purpose-built structures such as churches, refectories, cells, work areas, and stables.<sup>6</sup> Often, however, tomb habitation is documented in individual archaeological site reports, which record more modest alterations: the partitioning of tomb courtyards; installation of pavements, benches, and

2. *SBo* 12.10 (CSCO 89). Translation from Armand Veilleux, *Pachomian Koinonia*, Cistercian Studies 45 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Press, 1980), 1:34.

3. For the walls of the Pachomian community, see Henry Chadwick, “Pachomius and the Idea of Sanctity,” in *The Byzantine Saint: University of Birmingham Fourteenth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. Sergei Hackel (London: Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1981), 14–15.

4. For a list of inhabited necropoleis in late antiquity, see the author’s forthcoming dissertation.

5. Alexander Badawy identified tomb habitation as the early stage of an evolutionary model of the development of monastic space (“L’premiers établissements chrétiens dans les anciennes tombes d’Égypte,” *Publications de l’institut d’études orientales de la bibliothèque patriarcale d’Alexandrie* 2 [1953]: 67–89).

6. Peter Grossmann, “Dayr Anba Hadra: Architecture,” *Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1991), 3:745–46; “Dayr Apa Jeremias: Archeology,” *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 3:773–76.

cooking facilities; plastering and painting of walls, inscribing of figures and texts upon them; and carving of shelves and lamp niches.

Although archaeologists and historians have often observed the phenomenon of tomb habitation,<sup>7</sup> there has been little effort to quantify it and scholarly explanations are generally limited to citing "imitation of Antony" based on the passage from that saint's *Life* quoted above.<sup>8</sup> The popularity of certain literary texts and even the vocabulary used to describe the location of dwellings depicted in literary and documentary texts have obscured the reality of a practice readily discernable in the archaeological record. For example, Christian writers Jerome (c. 342–420 C.E.) and John Cassian (360–435 C.E.) successfully propagated the literary construction of two legitimate models of monasticism to the West in their late fourth- and early fifth-century writings.<sup>9</sup> Although frequently repeated by modern scholars to the present, the binary system that distinguishes between communal monasticism and anchoritic monasticism has been successfully refuted by a number of scholars, especially over the last thirty years.<sup>10</sup> Instead of a strict bifurcation, anchoritic and communal monasticism seem to have been two extremes of a whole spectrum of possibilities. So too, it is clear that the *space* in which ascetics in late antique Egypt might practice their discipline included households in cities and towns; deserted towns; cemeteries; and the outer or inner desert.<sup>11</sup> Despite the impression

7. For example, Badawy, "L'premiers établissements chrétiens"; T. G. Wilfong, "Western Thebes in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries: A Bibliographic Survey of Jeme and Its Surroundings," *Bulletin of the Society of American Papyrologists* 26 (1989): 89–145; Ewa Wipszycka, "Monks and Monastic Dwellings: P. Dublin 32–34, KRU 105 and BL Ms. Or. 6201–6206 Revisited," forthcoming. I thank Petra Sijpesteijn for providing me with this last reference.

8. For example, Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "Prophethood, Texts and Artifacts: The Monastery of Epiphanius," *GRBS* 39 (1998): 307–24; Christopher J. Kirby and Sara E. Orel, "From Cave to Monastery: Transformations at the Nome Frontier of Gebel el-Haridi in Upper Egypt," in *Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity*, ed. R. W. Mathiesen and H. Sivan (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1986), 201–14.

9. Jerome, *ep.* 22.34 (CSEL 54); John Cassian, *Conferences* 18.4 (CSEL 13).

10. This theme is especially prominent in the work of Ewa Wipszycka and James E. Goehring. See their respective collected volumes, *Études sur le christianisme dans l'Égypte de l'antiquité tardive*, *Studia ephemeridis Augustinianum* 52 (Paris: Institutum patristicum Augustinianum, 1996); and *Ascetics, Society, and the Desert: Studies in Early Egyptian Monasticism*, *Studies in Antiquity and Christianity* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999).

11. E. A. Judge, "Fourth-Century Monasticism in the Papyri," *Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Congress of Papyrology*, *New York*, 24–31 July 1980, *American Studies in Papyrology* 22 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 613–20; Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), 227–82. Important contributions to

gleaned from frequently referenced authors such as John Cassian and Jerome, ascetics chose among this continuum of options, and they could, and quite often did, travel between them.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the more important factor contributing to historians' neglect of the phenomenon of ascetic reuse of necropoleis for settlement is the ambiguity of the Greek and Coptic vocabulary used in Egypt to describe "the desert." The construction of "the desert" has always been central to the historiography of Egyptian monasticism. Early Christians understood it especially as a site of redemption and salvation, and evoked the examples of Elijah, John the Baptist, and especially Jesus.<sup>13</sup> And yet in Egypt, "the desert" can refer to anything beyond the band of cultivation that flanks the Nile in Middle and Upper Egypt.<sup>14</sup> It is the regular designation for the often-steep grade, or desert escarpment, that marks the transition from the river valley to the desert plateau, and even for land adjacent to the cultivation that leads up to the escarpment. It was precisely here that Egyptians have buried their dead for millennia, just beyond the range of cultivation and within visiting distance. The vocabulary of the desert in Egypt reflects the topography of the landscape. It is crucial to recognize that both the Greek word ὄρος and Coptic word ʿrooy refer to the desert

---

the archaeology and interpretation of monastic space include the papers edited by Thelma Thomas and collected in *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 35 (1998); Darlene Brooks Hedstrom, "'Your Cell Will Teach You All Things': The Relationship between Monastic Practice and the Architectural Design of the Cell in Coptic Monasticism, 400–1000" (PhD diss., Miami University, Ohio, 2001).

12. Daniel Caner, *Wandering, Begging Monks: Spiritual Authority and the Promotion of Monasticism in Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 33 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

13. Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 37 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), 105–25; Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

14. Recent archaeological surveys of Egypt's Eastern and Western deserts offer a crucial corrective to ancient literary and modern academic conceptualizations of "the desert" as an undelineated, unpeopled waste. The available evidence compiled so far suggests that traffic in Egypt's deserts reached its apex in the first–sixth centuries C.E.: Renée Friedman, ed., *Egypt and Nubia: Gifts of the Desert* (London: British Museum Press, 2003); Olaf Kaper and Willeke Wendrich, ed., *Life on the Fringe: Living in the Southern Egyptian Deserts during the Roman and Early-Byzantine Periods* (Leiden: Research School CNWS School of Asian African and Amerindian Studies, 1998). For the Theban region, see John Darnell and Deborah Darnell, *Theban Desert Road Survey in the Egyptian Western Desert*, Oriental Institute Publications 119 (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2002).

escarpment and can be translated "mountain" and "desert," as well as "cemetery" and "monastery."<sup>15</sup>

The fluidity of meanings conveyed by these terms should alert us to ancient understandings of the natural and built landscape. The monuments of Egypt were then, as they are now, a fact of life. They are not simply passive artifacts of the past, but have actively influenced generations of Egyptians for millennia.<sup>16</sup> Once the terrestrial homes of deities, dead kings, and other elites, such monuments continue to play, in the terms of Henri Lefebvre, a socializing role.<sup>17</sup> In the last century they have shaped Egyptian national as well as pan-Arab identity, often in tension with their role as tourist attractions.<sup>18</sup> So too, in late antiquity, Christians responded to their monumental landscape in a variety of ways and these responses were tied to their immediate social and political contexts.<sup>19</sup> Monuments might be destroyed (e.g., the Serapeum at Alexandria), adapted and reused (e.g., temples at Karnak, Luxor, Philae, Edfu), and reimagined. This latter point is well illustrated by the author of the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, who evoked biblical authority when he identified the great pyramids of Giza as Joseph's granaries in accordance with Gen 41.25–57.<sup>20</sup>

This paper explores how the residents of late sixth- to eighth-century Western Thebes understood the region's monumental funerary landscape as dwelling places and sites of ascetic practice. Put simply, it is important to establish if the occupants of a given necropolis-settlement recognized the funerary purpose originally intended by their dwellings. If so, we may explore the extent to which the funerary associations of the architecture were exploited, in which contexts, by whom, and to what purpose.

After quickly demonstrating shifts in the spatial distribution of settlements and cemeteries in two distinct areas of Western Thebes, we will

15. Hélène Cadell and Roger Rémondon, "Sens et emplois de *to oros* dans les documents papyrologique," *Revue des études grecques* 80 (1967): 343–49; W. E. Crum, *Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939; reprinted 1990), 440b–41b.

16. For medieval Muslim perceptions of Egypt's past, see Michael Cook, "Pharaonic History in Medieval History," *Studia Islamica* 57 (1983): 67–103, and Ulrich Haarmann, "Medieval Muslim Perceptions of Pharaonic Egypt," in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 605–27.

17. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991).

18. Donald Malcolm Reid, *Whose Pharaohs?: Archaeology, Museums, and Egyptian National Identity from Napoleon to World War I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

19. Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes towards Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *DOP* 44 (1990): 47–61.

20. *HM* 18.3 (SH 34).

briefly observe how authors of literary texts concerning saints who lived in the Theban Mountain (ὄρος Μενονίων/ΠΤΟΟΥ ΠΙΧΗΜΕ) understood such repurposed space. Finally we will explore the vocabulary of space in one genre of documentary papyri unearthed at Western Thebes.<sup>21</sup> Wills (διαθήκαι) seek to delimit boundaries of property (which happened in these cases to be funerary architecture inhabited by monks) and ensure its unchallenged transmission. The wills provide the working vocabulary which monks and their scribes used to describe space; they consequently offer one point of access through which we may explore how the region's inhabitants understood their monumental landscape. From the confluence of archaeological, literary, and papyrological sources, we can begin to explore the range of Christian responses to the monumental funerary architecture of Western Thebes and, more generally, the ways in which Christians sought to reconcile, refocus, or reject traditional conceptions of domestic space.<sup>22</sup>

Before proceeding, I should clarify the use of two sets of terms employed throughout this paper. First, "ascetic" is used of any person or community attempting a disciplined life (or period of life) characterized externally by the renunciation of sex, controlled diet, and sleep (e.g., individuals bearing the titles *parthenos* or *monachos/ē*),<sup>23</sup> whereas "monk" is reserved for men and women bearing the title *monachos/ē* or higher ranking monastic titles such as *hegoumenos/ē*, *proestōs/ōsa*. Second, "necropolis" denotes the location of monumental funerary architecture, whereas "cemetery" describes collections of graves (including those of late antique date). Such graves usually consist of simple or dressed pits carved down into the ground or into compacted debris. This artificial clarification of terms is meant to limit confusion between what are essentially collections of pits (cemeteries) and the monuments reused in late antiquity. Nevertheless, as will become apparent, collections of graves very frequently occupied the monuments of the necropolis as well as the open ground between them.

21. Editions of documentary papyri are abbreviated throughout the following according to the conventions set by John F. Oates et al., *Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets* (American Society of Papyrologists, 2001), <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html> (accessed 25 August 2006).

22. See also Bowes, Sessa, and Hillner in this volume.

23. For a detailed discussion of what constitutes asceticism according to Basil of Caesarea's definition, see Elm, *Virgins*, 66. For copies of works attributed to or concerning Basil of Caesarea discovered at Western Thebes, see H. E. Winlock and W. E. Crum, *Monastery of Epiphanius* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926), 1:200 and 202 and Iwona Antoniak, "Recent Discoveries in the Hermitage of Sheikh abd el-Gurna: Coptic Codices and Ostraca," forthcoming.

## THE OCCUPATION OF THE THEBAN NECROPOLIS

Modern Luxor is the richest archaeological site in Egypt and home to some of the most recognizable ancient monuments (fig. 1). The enormous temple complexes on the east bank are all that remains of pharaonic Egypt's traditional southern capital.<sup>24</sup> The west bank, beyond the cultivation, served as the city's necropolis. Today the west bank holds several of ancient Egypt's most iconic monuments: the colossal statues of Amenhotep III, the tombs of the Valley of the Kings, a dozen large mortuary temples originally dedicated to the funerary cult of individual pharaohs, and hundreds of tombs belonging to royals and other elites (fig. 2).

Until late antiquity, most of the monuments in the Theban necropolis were reused for burial with the result that most accessible tombs became mass graves and mortuary temples became cemeteries. An early example of this practice in Western Thebes was the mortuary temple of Ramesses III, now known as Medinet Habu, which was used for elite burials not long after it was built. This practice declined as the temple became a center for a growing settlement and, by the Ptolemaic period (c. 332–330 B.C.E.), the dead were buried outside the temple enclosure.<sup>25</sup> During the first millennium B.C.E., Medinet Habu became the primary civic settlement in this area of the west bank and, in Egyptian, was called Jeme.<sup>26</sup>

Even when the capital city on the east bank declined in political power in the course of the first millennium B.C.E. in favor of the district capitals to the north and south, the Theban necropolis remained perhaps more

24. For an introduction to the topography of Thebes east and west, see Nigel and Helen Strudwick, *Thebes in Egypt: A Guide to the Tombs and Temples of Ancient Thebes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

25. For burials within the temple precinct dating from at least Dynasty XXV–XXVI, see Uvo Hölscher, *The Excavation of Medinet Habu*, 5 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934–54), 5:19–20, 30–33. “Tomb 7,” dating to the Ptolemaic period, is one possible exception, but, as conceded by Hölscher, it may not have functioned as a tomb (16). Roman remains of Memnoneia/Jeme within the enclosure wall are exclusively those of a settlement and it is not clear that the earlier tombs and graves located therein were recognized as such in the Roman period; the Roman and late Roman cemetery was located north and west of the enclosure wall. The town Memnoneia/Jeme remained populated until about 800 C.E. See Uvo Hölscher, *Excavation of Medinet Habu*, 1:pl. 34 and 5:14–44.

26. The Temple of Seti I was also a settlement of some kind in late antiquity. In contrast to Medinet Habu, its remains were not as systematically published and its late antique toponym is unknown. Karol Mysliwiec, *Keramik und Kleinfunde aus der Grabung im Tempel Sethos, I. in Gurna* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag P. von Zabern, 1987).



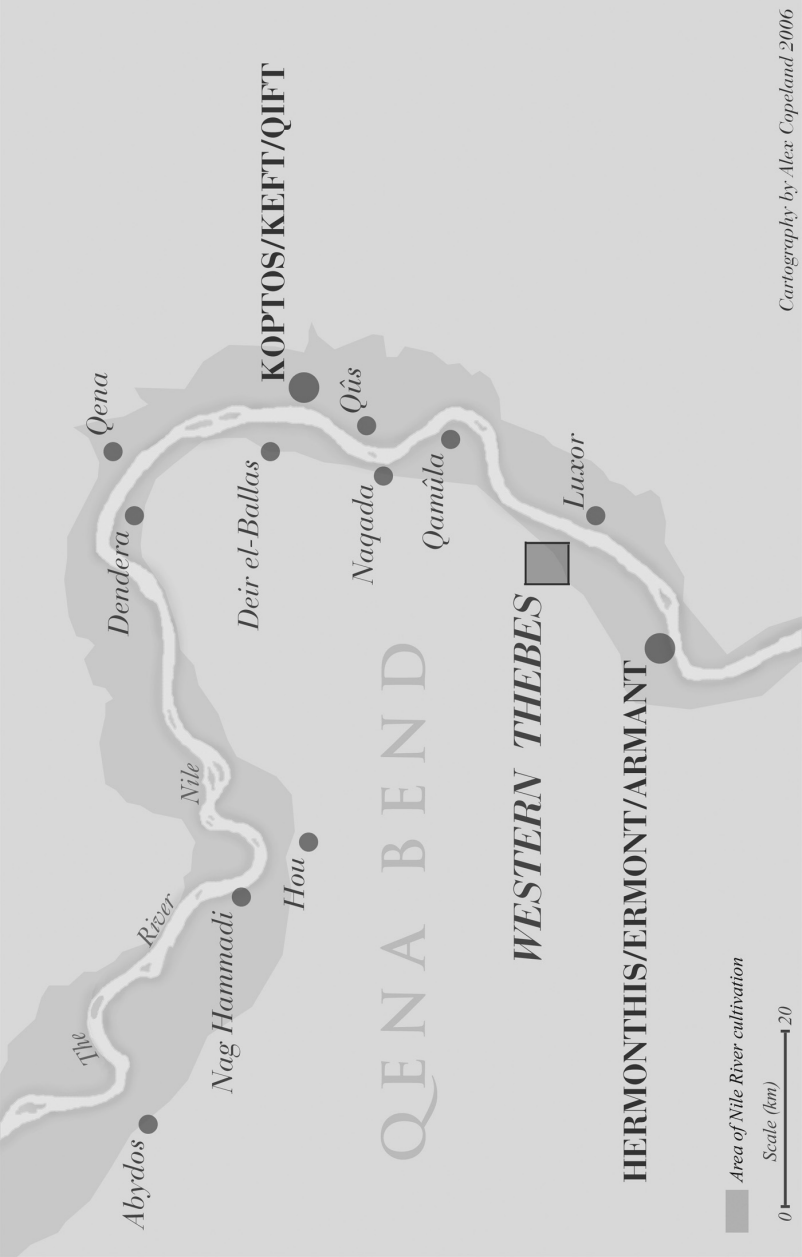


Figure 1. Map of the Qena Bend.



Figure 2. Map of Western Thebes. Cartography by Alex Copeland.

popular than ever for burial well into the Roman period.<sup>27</sup> It was also a popular tourist destination as we know from Strabo (17.1.46), Pausanias (1.42.3), and Ammianus Marcellinus (6.43, 16.15), and especially from

27. On Roman Thebes, Katelijin Vandenborpe, "City of Many a Gate, Harbour for Many a Rebel," in *Hundred-Gated Thebes: Acts of a Colloquium on Thebes and the Theban Area in the Graeco-Roman Period*, ed. S. P. Vleeming, Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 27 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 201–40. On the topography of Roman burials, see Nigel Strudwick, "Some Aspects of the Archaeology of the Theban Necropolis in the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods," in *The Theban Necropolis: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nigel Strudwick and John H. Taylor (London: British Museum Press,

thousands of Greek and Latin graffiti inscribed by travelers.<sup>28</sup> At the time, travelers understood the statues of Amenhotep III as representing the Greek mythological king Memnon and they considered an enormous tomb in the Valley of the Kings, now known less romantically as KV 9, to be his burial place.<sup>29</sup> The association of Western Thebes with Memnon inspired its Greek toponym, the Memnoneia.<sup>30</sup>

In Western Thebes, as elsewhere in Egypt, we should not imagine that the necropoleis were ever devoid of life. The cities of the dead had always been bustling with the activities of the living. The funerary industry responsible for building tombs, preparing and burying the dead, and especially maintaining their cults required an extensive labor force.<sup>31</sup> So too, the families of the deceased were obliged to visit the necropolis.<sup>32</sup> We should also remember that reuse of necropoleis had been common practice throughout Egyptian history. From the earliest times, individuals, families, and communities frequently usurped funerary architecture, coffins, and grave goods to be redeployed in the service of new burials.<sup>33</sup>

---

2003), 189–201. On the attractions of continuing to bury in Western Thebes in the Roman period, see Dominic Montserrat and Lynn Meskell, “Mortuary Archaeology and Religious Landscape at Graeco-Roman Deir el-Medina,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 83 (1997): 179–97.

28. For a critical assessment of resources for the study of graffiti and bibliography, see T. G. Wilfong, “Western Thebes,” 132. For discussion of the content of Greek and Latin graffiti on the colossal statues and in the Valley of the Kings, see André Bataille, *Memnonia: Recherches de papyrologie et d'épigraphie grecques sur la nécropole de la Thèbes d'Égypte aux époques hellénistique et romaine* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1952), 153–79.

29. Alan Gardiner, “Egyptian Memnon,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 47 (1961): 91–99.

30. For orthographical variants of the Memnoneia, see Stefan Timm, *Das christlich-koptische Ägypten in arabischer Zeit*, Beiheft zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B (Geisteswissenschaften) 41, 6 vols. (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1984), 3:1012. For a discussion and bibliography concerning the controversial origins of the Greek toponym, see Adam Łukaszewicz, “Memnon, King of Egypt,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 25 (1995): 131–46. Concerning the limits of the Memnoneia and its administrative districts in the Graeco-Roman period, see P. W. Pestman, *Archive of the Theban Choachytes (Second Century B.C.)*, *Studia Demotica* 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 1993), 411–16.

31. Tomasz Derda, “Necropolis Workers in Graeco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Greek Papyri,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 21 (1991): 13–36.

32. For evidence of funerals in Roman period papyri, see Dominic Montserrat, “Death and Funerals in the Roman Fayum,” in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. M. L. Bierbrier (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 33–44.

33. John Baines and Peter Lacovara, “Burial and the Dead in Ancient Egyptian Society: Respect, Formalism, Neglect,” *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2 (2002): 5–32.

What is so striking about the reuse of necropoleis in late antiquity is not only that they were put to a different purpose, that people *lived* in what had traditionally been “cities of the dead,” but the sheer numbers who did so. Rather than a temporary escape from tax collectors, high floodwaters, and other threats, the practice of adapting funerary architecture for habitation became common in late antiquity.<sup>34</sup>

Archaeological remains demonstrate the occupation of funerary architecture in the Theban necropolis from the end of the sixth century C.E. By the early seventh century, every region of the Theban Mountain was subject to settlement by individuals or communities.<sup>35</sup> When the names and titles of the inhabitants of the Theban necropolis are known from excavated documentary papyri, these people are almost always monks and clerics. Surviving datable documents—the focus of this paper—concern the period between the late sixth and late eighth centuries, when the most prominent late antique purpose-built features were constructed (e.g., towers in *P.KRU* 75). Evidence of earlier habitation (before the end of the sixth century) may have been more ephemeral or simply over-built by subsequent occupation. The lack of papyrological evidence for the fifth and early sixth centuries is the result of several competing factors, including the uneven survival of papyri and even modern editorial practice.<sup>36</sup>

34. I do not rule out the possibility that tombs were reused for purposes other than burial in other epochs. For fugitives, see graffiti in Charles Bachatly, *Monastère de Phoebammon dans la Thébaidé*, 3 vols. (Cairo: Publications de la Société d'archéologie copte, 1961–1981), 2: *I.Phoeb.Gr* 2 and 5; *I.Phoeb.Copt.* 30 and 43. For the modern occupation of tombs as a temporary escape from flood waters and, more permanently, as a result of the growing antiquities trade, see Caroline Simpson, “Modern Qurna—Pieces of an Historical Jigsaw,” in *Theban Necropolis: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nigel Strudwick and John H. Taylor (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 244–49, at 244.

35. See the author's forthcoming dissertation for a discussion of published sites. A mission directed by Guy Lecuyot (Paris) and Catherine Thirard (Lyon) is in the process of mapping “Christian remains” in the Theban necropolis. Still a useful survey is Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 6–24.

36. If people lived in the Theban Mountain during this period, writing may not have been as significant a part of their daily lives as it was for their successors. Extant Byzantine Greek documents (e.g., *O.Bodl.* I), which best represent the fourth, fifth, and early sixth centuries C.E., are not as well provenanced and published as later (seventh- and eighth-century) Coptic documents. On this latter point, for example, Greek ostraca unearthed by the Oriental Institute's excavation of Medinet Habu have not been published at all, whereas parts of the demotic and Coptic corpora have been edited (*O.Medin.HabuDem.* and *O.Medin.HabuCopt.*). “Medinet Habu ostraca: Excavation of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago 1928/1929,” in *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyes to Constantine and Beyond*, ed.

*The Transformation of Sheikh abd el-Gurna and Deir el-Bahri*

Two archaeologically documented necropolis-settlements in Western Thebes will be the main focus of the following discussion. One is still partially installed in and among several tombs at Sheikh abd el-Gurna and the other once stood just across the valley upon the ruins of the Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri. Both date from at least the end of the sixth century and are documented by several different kinds of textual sources. Inscriptions and graffiti offer one important, relatively permanent indicator of the use of space. Texts written on papyri, potsherds, or limestone flakes offer another. The contents of some texts retrieved from excavations are “literary” and illuminate the reading habits of the region’s residents.<sup>37</sup> Most texts, however, record a great variety of social and economic transactions in the forms of letters, petitions, contracts, receipts, and other “documentary” texts. The documents demonstrate that the inhabitants of the Theban Mountain were involved in every aspect of the social, administrative, and economic lives of Memnoneia/Jeme’s citizens. These texts also indicate that, at least from the turn of the seventh century, the Theban Mountain was home to several bishops, including Pisentios of Koptos/Keft and Abraham of Hermonthis/Ermont. Rather than living in the district capitals to the north and south, the bishops lived at Sheikh abd el-Gurna and Deir el-Bahri, respectively.<sup>38</sup> Monastic communities at both locations are documented by wills (διαθήκαι), which record the transmission of property over the course of several generations of “spiritual” families. What follows is intended to demonstrate how such space was used based on what we may observe in the archaeological record. In particular, we can note the complicated spatial relationship the inhabitants of the two areas had to both the ancient and more recently dead.

Sheikh abd el-Gurna is a hill honeycombed with large, ancient Egyptian tombs reused in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods for burials.<sup>39</sup> From at

---

Janet H. Johnson (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1992), 165–68; T. G. Wilfong, “Coptic Texts in the Oriental Institute Museum: A Preliminary Survey” in *Acts of the Fifth International Congress of Coptic Studies, Washington DC, 12–15 August 1992*, ed. David W. Johnson (Rome: CIM, 1993), 525–30. On diachronic language preference and patterns of use in general, see Roger S. Bagnall, *Reading Papyri, Writing Ancient History* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19–22.

37. For example, *P.Mon.Epiph.* includes not only biblical, liturgical, and homiletic texts, but Homer and Menander (apparently school exercises).

38. See below and note 65.

39. Strudwick, “Some Aspects,” 175–76. Christina Riggs, *The Beautiful Burial in Roman Egypt: Art, Identity, and Funerary Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 184.

least the end of the sixth century, several clusters of ancient tombs were outfitted for habitation. Remains continue to be excavated today, but one of these clusters had the benefit of early archaeological attention and relatively careful excavation and documentation.<sup>40</sup> Modern scholars now know the site as the Monastery of Epiphanius, although, as the editors of its publication concede, it is nowhere called a monastery (ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ) in the papyri, but rather the holy *topos* (ΤΟΠΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΛΑΒ).<sup>41</sup> The site was built up gradually in accordance with the needs of its occupants.<sup>42</sup> The enormous rock-cut tomb of a Dynasty XI (2119–1976 B.C.E.) official named Daga seems to have formed the original core of the community, and six tombs were eventually incorporated into the cluster (fig. 3). At least three other tombs converted to habitation were situated at a distance and may have been part of the same community.<sup>43</sup> The inhabitants altered the interiors of these tombs very little, only carving lamp niches, inserting shelves and a bench or two, sometimes whitewashing walls and painting inscriptions and figures upon them.<sup>44</sup> At the mouths of the tombs, late antique builders typically constructed vestibules by partitioning existing tomb architecture, and they built stairs to overcome the disjunction of floor levels (fig. 4). In the courtyards of the original tombs, they erected other structures and amenities. Often built using redeployed building material, these included two towers, workrooms, loom pits, granaries, and

40. The publication consists of vol. 1, cited here as “Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*” and editions of texts in vol. 2, as *P.Mon.Epiph.* For recent reports concerning habitation on Sheikh abd el-Gurna, see Tamás Bács, “So-Called ‘Monastery of Cyriacus’ at Thebes,” *Egyptian Archaeology* 17 (2000): 34–36; Roland Tefnin, “Archéologie et conservation dans les chapelles de Sennefer (TT 96) et Aménénopé (TT 29),” *Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie* 154 (2002): 7–27; Chantal Heurtel, “Nouveaux aperçus de la vie anchorétique dans la montagne thébaine: les ostraca coptes de la tombe a'Aménénopé (TT29),” *Bulletin de la Société française d'égyptologie* 154 (2002): 29–45; Andrea Maria Gnirs, et al., “Zweiter Vorbericht über die Aufnahme und Publikation von Gräbern der 18. Dynastie der thebanischen Beamtennekropole,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abt. Kairo* 53 (1997): 57–83.

41. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius* 1:127; Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten*, 1336–38. Although I use “Monastery of Epiphanius” for simplicity throughout the following, I think it is important not to assume all *topoi* are monasteries.

42. For the chronology of the building, see Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:25–50; Catherine Thirard, “L'organisation architecturale des montastères d'après les textes et l'archéologie” *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit: Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20.–26. Juli 1996*, vol.1, ed. Stephen Emmel, et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 389–92.

43. Cells A–C, Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:39.

44. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:44.





Figure 4. View from the interior of the Tomb of Daga (TT 103)/Monastery of Epiphanius, 2006. Photo by the author.

latrines.<sup>45</sup> Excavators considered a secondary burial pit, dating perhaps from the first millennium B.C.E. and located in the corridor floor of an adapted Dynasty XI (2119–1976 B.C.E.) tomb to be a retreat for a monk, “to conduct his devotions in absolute solitude.”<sup>46</sup> We need not adhere to this interpretation, but we should keep in mind that this ancient burial shaft was an active part of the complex. Like many of the documented communities in late antique Western Thebes, the Monastery of Epiphanius had its own small cemetery containing ten or eleven graves and situated outside the enclosure wall.<sup>47</sup>

45. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:25–50.

46. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:43.

47. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:45–50, fig. 9, pl. 3. For late antique cemeteries adjoining settlements in Western Thebes, see for Qurnet Marai, Georges Castel, “Étude d’une momie copte,” in *Hommages à la mémoire de Serge Sauneron, 1927–1976*, Bibliothèque d’étude 82 (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale au Caire, 1979), 121–43. For Deir el-Medina, M. Émile Baraize, “Compte rendu des travaux exécutés à Dêr-el-Médinéh,” *Annales du Service des Antiquités* 13 (1914): 23 and pls. 8–9; Chantal Heurtel, *Les inscriptions coptes et grecques du temple d’Hathor*



A program of monumental painted inscriptions in Coptic, Greek, and Syriac in the core of the complex reflects the historical milieu of late sixth-through eighth-century C.E. Western Thebes and indicates the theological orientation of the inhabitants of the Monastery of Epiphanius. Proceeding from the gate to the vestibule, a visitor to the *topos* encountered the following texts: Damian's 578 (anti-Chalcedonian) synodal letter (praising Athanasius, Cyril, and Severus of Antioch); extracts of epistles of Severus of Antioch; Athanasius's (anti-Arian) *Letter to the Monks*; and the *Twelve Anathemas* of Cyril as well as extracts of that bishop's homilies.<sup>48</sup> Thousands of papyri and ostraca excavated at the site demonstrate the continuum of spiritual to more mundane daily affairs of the region's residents. In particular, we may note that several letters addressed to Pisentios, the Bishop of Koptos/Keft, led excavators to believe that he lived at the Monastery of Epiphanius for a time.

The Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri is located only c. 350 meters from the Monastery of Epiphanius, across the valley known today as the Assasif. This mortuary temple was not originally built to accommodate burials; however, it was used intermittently as a cemetery from as early as the eighth century B.C.E. Its chapels were reused as tombs and its terraces were punctured with burial shafts and pitted with graves.<sup>49</sup> The sanctuaries of the gods that were part of Hatshepsut's original mortuary complex maintained the site's cultic function periodically throughout the first millennium B.C.E. The mixing of cultic space dedicated to gods and space reserved for burial can be viewed as part of a larger trend in first millennium B.C.E. Egypt. In the Ptolemaic era, there were at least two active cult sites on the terraces of the temple. A chapel dedicated to the Egyptian goddess

---

à *Deir al-Médina* (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 2003). For another small, monastic cemetery on Sheikh abd el Gurna, see Bács, "Monastery of Cyriacus," 34–36. For Deir el-Bahri, see note 59, below.

48. I have reproduced the order of the inscriptions here in accordance with Leslie MacCoull's reconstruction of the texts a visitor would encounter as he or she proceeded from the gate to the inner rooms of the complex. MacCoull, "Prophethood," 314–16.

49. For a brief survey of the encounters of early European visitors and "excavators" with large numbers of mummies buried at Deir el-Bahri, see Cynthia Sheikholeslami, "Burials of the Priests of Montu at Deir el-Bahari in the Theban Necropolis," in *The Theban Necropolis: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Nigel Strudwick and John H. Taylor (London: British Museum Press, 2003), 131–37. For surveys of first millennium B.C.E. and Roman period burials at Deir el-Bahri, in the same volume, see Miroslav Barwick, "New Data concerning the Third Intermediate Period Cemetery in the Hatshepsut Temple at Deir el-Bahari," 122–30; and Strudwick, "Some Aspects," 174.

Hathor maintained a cult to her Hellenistic equivalent, Aphrodite.<sup>50</sup> In the second century B.C.E., Ptolemy VIII established a sanctuary of Imhotep and Amenhotep son of Hapu in the main axial shrine of the temple; a healing cult, eventually dedicated to Amenhotep, Imhotep-Asclepius, and Hygeia, functioned there into the second century C.E.<sup>51</sup> Deir el-Bahri in the late third and perhaps early fourth century C.E. was a popular burial site, as a number of graves excavated by the Egypt Exploration Fund (now Society) and the Metropolitan Museum of Art attest.<sup>52</sup> For the period between 324 and 327/328 C.E., at least four Greek painted inscriptions record annual visits by iron-workers from Hermonthis to the upper terrace of the temple where they apparently sacrificed a donkey.<sup>53</sup>

The relative lack of evidence for the fifth and early sixth centuries C.E. is all the more frustrating because, by the late sixth century C.E., the upper terrace of the temple of Hatshepsut had been transformed into a monastery with an important martyr shrine dedicated to Saint Phoibammon.<sup>54</sup> At this time, the area seems to have been understood as deserted (Ερημος, *P.KRU* 105.16). Papyrological sources from c. 600 C.E. describe the complex as both a *topos* and a monastery (ΜΟΝΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ).<sup>55</sup> Most of the late antique installations were removed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Egyptologists eager to uncover the pharaonic temple beneath. In 1986 W. Godlewski published a compilation of all of the available evidence for

50. Roger S. Bagnall and Dominic Rathbone, *Egypt from Alexander to the Early Christians: An Archaeological and Historical Guide* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004), 193–94.

51. Ewa Laskowska-Kusztal, *Le sanctuaire ptolémaïque de Deir el-Bahari* (Warsaw: PWN Éditions scientifiques de Pologne, 1984); Bataille, *Inscriptions grecques du temple de Hatshepsout à Deir el-Bahari* (Cairo: Imprimerie de l'Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1951).

52. Christina Riggs, "Roman Mummy Masks from Deir el-Bahri," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 86 (2000): 121–44.

53. Adam Łajtar, "Proskynema Inscriptions of a Corporation of Iron-Workers from Hermonthis in the Temple of Hatshepsut in Deir el-Bahari: New Evidence for Pagan Cults in Egypt in the 4th cent. A.D.," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 21 (1991): 53–70. Łajtar dated the last inscription to 357. For revised dating of the inscriptions, see Roger S. Bagnall, "Last Donkey Sacrifice at Deir el-Bahari," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 34 (2004): 15–21. For one interpretation of the inscriptions, see David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 64.

54. Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten*, 1378–92; Arietta Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides: l'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2001), 206–14.

55. Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten*, 1378.



Figure 5. Remains of the Temple of Hatshepsut/Monastery of Phoibammon, c. 1892 (Courtesy of the Egypt Exploration Society).

the late antique site.<sup>56</sup> The most visible feature of the monastery, its tower, is apparent in nineteenth-century photos (fig. 5), but today only graffiti are visible indicators of the use of space in late antiquity (fig. 6).<sup>57</sup>

In addition to the rock-cut chapels of the original pharaonic mortuary temple, there are numerous rock-cut tombs in the cliff faces around the monument, and archaeological remains such as pottery, lamps, weaving implements; other tools, graffiti, and ostraca suggest that these too were reused for habitation.<sup>58</sup> Late antique burials resembling those unearthed at the Monastery of Epiphanius were localized in the vestibule of the chapel of Hatshepsut at the south end of the upper temple terrace. According to

56. Włodzimierz Godlewski, *Le monastère de St. Phoibammon*, Deir el-Bahari 5 (Warsaw: PWN Editions scientifiques de Pologne, 1986).

57. Catalogued in Godlewski, *Phoibammon*, 141–52; Pockocke's descriptions of painted saints in *Description of the East and Some Other Countries* (London: 1743), 100.

58. For example, TT 240, 310, 312. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:20; Godlewski, *Phoibammon*, 47. The discovery of fragments of a Roman burial shroud in TT 310 suggests that the tomb may have been reused in the Roman period.



Figure 6. Reconstructed Temple of Hatshepsut, 2006. Photo by the author.

Egypt Exploration Fund excavator, Edouard Naville, they were discovered in “some” bench-like structures constructed in the corners of the vestibule and contained “several” bodies each.<sup>59</sup> The chapel of Hatshepsut itself, which constituted the most elaborate interior space of the complex, was used as a Christian chapel.<sup>60</sup>

The Monastery of Phoibammon enjoyed the same intentionally dramatic setting of the Temple of Hatshepsut at the base of a spectacular bay of cliffs. The Assasif had provided a natural monumental approach from the Nile Valley and this approach had been amplified and elaborated with a great causeway in the second millennium B.C.E. The great rock-cut tomb

59. Unlike other burials Naville excavated throughout the complex and identified as “Coptic,” these can be confidently attributed to the monastery based on his description of the bodies and comparison to those from other late antique cemeteries. Edouard Naville, *Temple of Deir el Bahari*, 6 vols. (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1901), 4:6; Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:13; Godlewski, *Phoibammon*, 33, 47–49.

60. For the impressive interior, see, e.g., Dieter Arnold, “Temple of Hatshepsut at Deir el-Bahri,” in *Hatshepsut: From Queen to Pharaoh*, ed. Catharine H. Roehrig et al. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 135–40, at 138. Godlewski, *Phoibammon*, 36–39.

(TT 103), which formed the core of the Monastery of Epiphanius, was originally built overlooking Deir el-Bahri and this physical relationship between the two monuments *cum* monasteries remained the same in late antiquity.<sup>61</sup>

In Martin Krause's historical reconstruction, Abraham, bishop of Hermonthis/Ermont, moved his community from a more remote location to Deir el-Bahri in accordance with the orders of the (anti-Chalcedonian) archbishop of Alexandria, Damian.<sup>62</sup> The move perhaps took place in the 590s, but certainly at some point before Damian's death in 607 C.E.<sup>63</sup> Like Damian, who lived at Enaton some nine miles west of Alexandria, Abraham did not live permanently in the capital of his district, but resided, at least intermittently, at his monastery in the Theban Mountain.<sup>64</sup> Modern excavation at Deir el-Bahri has recovered thousands of texts written on papyri, pottery, and limestone ostraca belonging to the Monastery of Phoibammon. In addition to recording Abraham's tenure as bishop, these texts reveal that, by the eighth century, the monastery controlled much land and considerable resources in the area<sup>65</sup>; received a large number of "child donations"<sup>66</sup>; and functioned as the repository for Jeme's legal documents.<sup>67</sup> Despite the monastery's apparent abandonment c. 800 C.E., graffiti bear witness to its role as a pilgrimage site into the tenth to thirteenth centuries.<sup>68</sup>

61. TT 103 was originally built overlooking the great mortuary temple of Mentuhotep II, next to which Hatshepsut later built her temple.

62. Krause identifies the first location of the Monastery of Phoibammon with the site excavated by Société d'archéologie copte, published in three volumes (Bachaty, *Monastère de Phoebammon*).

63. Martin Krause, "Beziehungen zwischen den beiden Phoibammon-Klöstern auf dem thebanischen Westufer," *Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte* 27 (1985): 31–44.

64. Stephen Davis, *Early Coptic Papacy* (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2004), 108. See Bowes (this volume) for the situation in the fourth/fifth century Roman west where bishops were expected to live only in episcopal cities and Hillner (this volume) for the development of the legal relationship between the bishops and monasteries under Justinian.

65. For example, *P.KRU passim*.

66. For a comprehensive bibliography on child donations at the Monastery of Phoibammon, see Arietta Papaconstantinou, "Notes sur les actes donation d'enfant au monastère thébain de Saint-Phoibammon," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 32 (2002): 83, note 3.

67. T. G. Wilfong, *Women of Jeme: Lives in a Coptic Town in Late Antique Egypt* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 116.

68. Godlewski, *Phoibammon*, 141–52.

Having demonstrated shifts in the spatial distribution of cemeteries and settlements at late antique Sheikh abd el-Gurna and Deir el-Bahri, we might now ask how local civic communities interpreted these spaces. As durable, ready-made shelter, the funerary monuments certainly had enormous practical value, but to what extent was their original purpose as homes for the dead recognized and, if it was, did living in the Theban Mountain have ideological implications as well?

## LITERARY PERSPECTIVES ON TOMB HABITATION

Lest we imagine that the original function of these spaces was forgotten or ignored, we can turn to literary sources. In their effort to project biblical time onto the landscape of Egypt, fourth and fifth century pilgrims' accounts of Egyptian monasticism are remarkable for their lack of concrete physical description.<sup>69</sup> By contrast two later literary sources concerning residents of Western Thebes vividly describe the space inhabited by monks—in these cases, tombs. Like the *Life of Antony*, who was said to have spent time in a tomb in an attempt to perfect his ascetic discipline by fighting demons, these texts likewise emphasize the ascetic fortitude of their subjects.

Little known by modern scholars, Elias of the Mountain of Pšouēēb (ΠΟΟΥ ΠΠΩΟΥΗΗΒ) is a saint said to have lived in the Theban Mountain.<sup>70</sup> That his *Life* was read in Coptic in late antique Western Thebes is demonstrated by a short excerpt (with the heading ΕΒΟΛ ΖΗΠΡΙΟΣ ΠΑΠΑ ΖΕΛΙΑΣ ΠΠΤΟΟΥ ΠΠΩΟΥΗΗΒ), which survives on a limestone ostrakon excavated at the Monastery of Epiphanius (*P.Mon.Epiph.* 78). His Arabic *Life* is recorded in two unedited manuscripts, in which he appears as Elias of Gebel Bishwāw.<sup>71</sup> The Upper Egyptian recension of the Arabic Synaxarion

69. Georgia Frank, *Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 30 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

70. For Coptic Pšouēēb (Arabic Bīshwāw), see Timm, *Christlich-koptische Ägypten*, 987–90; René-Georges Coquin, “Elias of Bishwāw, Saint,” in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 952–53.

71. Coptic Museum, Hist. 475, folios 156–57 dated to the fourteenth century in Georg Graf, *Catalogue de manuscrits arabes chrétiens conservés au Caire*, ST 63 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1934), 16 (catalogue no. 718); Bibliothèque nationale, Paris arabe 153, folios 112–14 dated to the seventeenth century in Gérard Troupeau, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1972), 1:123 (catalogue no. 153).



of Egyptian Saints contains a brief account of Elias's time in the Theban Mountain (Arabic, Gebel Šâma).<sup>72</sup> Like Antony, the protagonist's time in a tomb is described as an ascetic feat, but not one including demons. The Synaxarion records that Elias's disciple John was spared from Elias's ascetic regimen because John could not live with him. The smell of the rotting of the ancient dead made him sick.<sup>73</sup>

Pisentios (c. 569–632), the bishop of Koptos/Keft from 599 to 632, spent many of his years in the Theban Mountain (ΠΤΟΟΥ ΠῃΧΝΗ) in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.<sup>74</sup> This bishop is uncommonly well documented in both literary and archaeological sources and presents a rare opportunity to examine the concordance (or discordance) of such sources.<sup>75</sup> He is represented by his *vita*,<sup>76</sup> and he is the author of at least one extant homily.<sup>77</sup> He was the recipient of many letters surviving on papyri and ostraca unearthed in excavations in Western Thebes and mentioned above.<sup>78</sup> In 2005, a Coptic codex containing the *Life of Pisentios* was discovered in a tomb dwelling located a short walk (c. 400 meters) from the core of the Monastery of Epiphanius.<sup>79</sup> Some recensions of his *Life* contain an anecdote that describes with surprising detail a tomb to which Pisentios is said to have withdrawn for an extended period.

72. He is commemorated on 17 Choiak (December 13). With French translation, R. Basset, *Le synaxaire arabe jacobite (rédaction copte)* (PO 3:474–82; with Latin translation, Iacobus Forget, *Synaxarium alexandrinum*, CSCO 47:242–47). Both editions are from the same Arabic MS (Paris. Arab. 4869 and 4870), dated to sixteenth century in E. Blochet, *Bibliothèque Nationale: Catalogue des manuscrits arabes des nouvelles acquisitions (1884–1924)* (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1925), 31. See the comments and bibliography of Papaconstantinou, *Culte des saints*, 28–29.

73. PO 3:482; CSCO 47:247.

74. His *Life* places him in the Theban Mountain during his early discipline (*Ar. Life* fol 98, PO 22:323); he apparently returned in 619 after the Sassanian invasion, and died in Koptos in 632.

75. Wilfong, *Women*, 24; J. van der Vliet, "Pisentios de Coptos (569–632) moine, évêque et saint: Autour d'une nouvelle édition de ses archives," in *Autour de Coptos: Actes du colloque organisé au Musée des Beaux-Arts de Lyon (17–18 mars 2000)*, ed. M.-F. Boussac (Lyon: Topoi: Orient-occident Supplement, 2001), 61–72.

76. For the numerous recensions of the *Life* see, Gawdat Gabra, *Untersuchungen zu den Texten über Pesyntheus: Bischof von Koptos (569–632)* (Bonn: R. Habelt, 1984); for additions to Gabra's catalogue of MSS, Wilfong "Western Thebes," 114.

77. W. E. Crum, "Discours de Pisenthios sur Saint Onnophrius," ROC 20 (1915–17): 38–67. Translation of 43–57 from Crum's edition in Tim Vivian, *Paphnutius: Histories of the Monks of Upper Egypt and the Life of Onnophrius*, Cistercian Studies Series 140 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1993), 175–88.

78. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:225; Wilfong, *Women*, 39–40.

79. 1152 = site VII in Winlock and Crum 1926, 1:10–11. See Antoniak, "Recent Discoveries."

When we had passed into that place we found it like carved stone, with six pillars supporting the rock, it being fifty-two cubits [about ninety feet] wide, and four-square, and also its height being proportionate, and here being many mummified bodies in it. If you were merely to pass through that place you would smell a quantity of perfumes diffused by the bodies. We took the mummies and piled them one upon another, and then the place was quite clear. The place where the bodies were was like a place that had been highly decorated, the first mummy, which was by the door, the garments in which it was bandaged were of the pure silk of kings, and it was very thick, and its fingers and toes were bandaged separately.<sup>80</sup>

This episode establishes the scene of one of the many miracles. The miracle at this point in the narrative is a conversation with a mummy, a self-described "pagan" (*hellene*) suffering in hell and seeking the help of the Pisentios.<sup>81</sup> The author clearly delighted in setting the scene by describing the details of the tomb's shape and size as well as the intricacies of the mummy's wrappings. The style of the tomb,<sup>82</sup> the bandaging technique,<sup>83</sup> and even the smell<sup>84</sup> are easily recognizable to modern Egyptologists. We should not be surprised at the accuracy of the depiction. After all, Pisentios and his disciple and biographer lived in the Theban Mountain for many years.<sup>85</sup> As a part of this episode Pisentios explains to his disciple that visiting the mummies reminded him that every individual was subject to death.<sup>86</sup>

80. "Un évêque de Keft au VII<sup>e</sup> siècle," ed. E. Amélineau, in *Mémoires présentés à l'Institut égyptien* 2 (1889): 401–3. Translation by Battiscomb Gunn in *Land of Enchanters: Egyptian Short Stories from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. Bernard Lewis and Stanley M. Burstein (Princeton, NJ: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2001), 106–7.

81. Amélineau, "Évêque de Keft," 407. For the Christian use of *hellene* to designate non-Christians, see Denise Kimber Buell, "Race and Universalism in Early Christianity," *J ECS* 10 (2002): 429–68.

82. Friederike Kampp, *Die Thebanische Nekropole: zum Wandel des Grabgedankens von der XVIII. bis zur XX. Dynastie*, Theben 13 (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 1996), 13.

83. Salima Ikram and Aidan Dodson, *Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the Dead for Eternity* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 153–65.

84. For the stench of XI Dynasty mummies (at first mistaken by excavators as "Coptic"), see Herbert E. Winlock, "Excavations at Thebes," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 23 (1928): 10–11.

85. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:223–24.

86. Amélineau, "Évêque de Keft," 403–4; *Arabic Life of S. Pisentios, According to the Text of the Two Manuscripts Paris Bib. nat., Arabe 4785, and Arabe 4794*, ed. and trans. De Lacy O'Leary, PO 22 (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1930), 422. Reflection upon human mortality may have been a concern for the historical Pisentios. While exhorting his "children and brothers" to imitate the saints, he states "Meditating on



There is, at present, no reliable critical edition for either the *Synaxarion* or the *Life of Pistentios* and, probably because they are “late” and shed little light on the ubiquitous search for Christian or monastic origins, these accounts are infrequently cited in secondary literature.<sup>87</sup> But they provide one extreme of ancient explanations for the practice of tomb habitation in Western Thebes. We find first that the narratives do indeed exploit the funerary connotations of the space. They ascribe ideological motives to both Elias and Pistentios in an effort to underscore the ascetic fortitude of each saint. Elias is able to endure a stench capable of driving away his disciple. Pistentios reflects on the inescapability of human mortality and blithely converses with a “pagan” mummy. Thus, what constitutes the ascetic feat differs in each text and also from the motivation for spending time in tombs given in the *Life of Antony*.

Both narratives are remarkable for the degree to which they correspond to what we find in the archaeological remains. The account concerning Elias in the *Synaxarion* recalls numerous tombs in the Theban necropolis reused for mass burials.<sup>88</sup> In particular, the description of the tomb given in the excerpt from the *Life of Pistentios* accords very well with the pilastered façades and pillared transverse halls of rock-cut tombs of Western Thebes (e.g., in fig. 3).<sup>89</sup> Yet, relying upon literary texts to explain the archaeological record is generally problematic.<sup>90</sup> The authors of the literary texts cited above have their own agendas—foremost, to support their protagonists’ claims of sanctity.

To gain a “more grounded” picture of the practice of reusing tombs, we may begin by asking other sets of textual sources how the residents of the Theban Mountain themselves may have perceived the inhabited space. The vocabulary used to describe space in documents offers a number of points of access to the physical description and conceptual construction

---

death, then, will cause us to flee from sin” (Crum, “Discours de Pistentius”; Vivian, *Paphnutius*, 183).

87. For the *Synaxarion*, see the critical comments and bibliography in René-Georges Coquin, “Editions of the *Synaxarion*,” in *Coptic Encyclopedia*, 2172–73. For the date and problematic manuscript tradition of the *Life of Pistentios*, see Gabra, *Pesyntheus*, 5–15 and *passim*.

88. Strudwick, “Some Aspects.”

89. The definitive study on ancient Theban tomb architecture is Kampp, *Thebanische Nekropole*.

90. Penelope Allison, “Using the Material and the Written Sources: Turn of the Millennium Approaches to Roman Domestic Space,” *AJA* 105 (2001): 181–208 and Bowes (this volume).

of the monuments occupied by monks in the Theban Mountain.<sup>91</sup> For example, letters of intercession written by inhabitants of local towns to the monks of Western Thebes reveal one kind of transaction in which letter writers request the prayers of holy men living there.<sup>92</sup> Legal documents effecting the transmission of property provide us with quite another set of transactions and record the working vocabulary monks and their scribes used to describe such space.<sup>93</sup> These will be the focus of the following discussion.

## THE VOCABULARY OF SPACE IN WILLS

Inheritance was perhaps the most heavily legislated activity in Roman and Byzantine law and required strict adherence to established formulae.<sup>94</sup> Wills are written instruments executed according to the conventions of Byzantine law by which a person makes disposition of his or her property to take effect after his or her death.<sup>95</sup> Since wills seek to describe the

91. For model studies of the vocabulary of space in the papyri, see Geneviève Husson, "L'habitat monastique en Égypte," *Hommages à la mémoire de Serge Sauneron*, Bibliothèque d'étude 82 (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1979), 191–207; *Oikia: Le vocabulaire de la maison privée en Égypte d'après les papyrus grecs*, Série "Papyrologie" 2 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1983). For Greek and Coptic vocabulary applied to homes in Jeme, see A. Arthur Schiller, "Family Archive from Jeme," in *Studi in onore di Vincenzo Arangio-Ruiz* 4 (Naples: Jovene, 1952), 364–86.

92. Claudia Rapp, "'For Next to God, You Are My Salvation': Reflections on the Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," in *Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston and Paul Antony Hayward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 63–81.

93. For the provenance and content of legal texts from Western Thebes, see discussion and bibliographies in Wilfong, "Western Thebes," 115–18, and A. Arthur Schiller, "Introduction," *Koptische Rechtsurkunden des achten Jahrhunderts aus Djeme (Theben)*, ed. W. E. Crum (reprinted as *Subsidia Byzantina* 18, Leipzig: 1971), unpaginated; and Tonio Sebastian Richter, *Rechtssemantik und forensische Rhetorik: Untersuchungen zu Wortschatz, Stil und Grammatik der Sprache koptischer Rechtsurkunden*, Kanobos, Forschungen zum griechisch-römischen Ägypten 3 (Leipzig, 2002).

94. Bruce W. Frier and Thomas A. J. McGinn, *Casebook on Roman Family Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 342.

95. For a list of surviving Greek (or partially Greek) wills produced c. 300 B.C.E.–700 C.E. see Orsolina Montevocchi, "Ricerche di sociologia nei documenti dell'Egitto greco-romano," *Aegyptus* 15 (1968): 68–72; supplemented by Orsolina Montevocchi, *Papirologia* (Turin: Società editrice internazionale, 1973), 207. For further additions and discussion, see Roger S. Bagnall, "Two Byzantine Legal Papyri in a Private Collection," in *Studies in Roman Law in Memory of A. Arthur Schiller*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall and William V. Harris (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 1–2. All Coptic papyri known

parties and real estate as precisely as possible in order to delimit boundaries of property and ensure its unchallenged transmission, they offer one especially valuable perspective as to how their authors understood the spaces they describe.

At least eighteen wills or fragments thereof dating from c. 610–750 C.E. are identified among texts from Western Thebes.<sup>96</sup> Wills were written in either Greek or Coptic, and sometimes in Coptic with a Greek invocation.<sup>97</sup> These are substantial documents: complete texts range from 70 to 160 lines and usually include some combination of standard formulae, e.g., invocation, dates (usually in multiple systems, i.e., regnal and consular, indiction, Era of the Martyrs, Hijra), identification of parties, designation of notary and witnesses, disposition of estate, inviolability of the will, penalties for non-compliance, witnesses, and notary signatures.<sup>98</sup>

Five of the eighteen surviving wills concern property that happened to be funerary architecture inhabited by monks: the Monastery of Epiphanius and the Monastery of Phoibammon. The wills demonstrate that these tomb/cell/homes were legally treated like private property; just like *oikos/ domus*, they were owned and inherited by the monks who lived in them.<sup>99</sup> These documents are almost identical to contemporary wills concerning

---

up to 1954 concerning succession and inheritance are collected in Walter Till, *Erbrechtliche Untersuchungen auf Grund der koptischen Urkunden*, Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 229 (Vienna: In Kommission bei R. M. Rohrer, 1954). To Till's list may be added the second half of *P.CrumVC* 5 by R. P. Salomons and P. J. Sijpestein, "Varia Coptica no. 5 Made Complete," *Enchoria* 15 (1987): 55–59.

96. *P.Lond.* I 77, *P.Mon.Epiph.* 87, *P.KRU* 65–77, *P.Lyon* (misattributed to *P.KRU* 77, see note 112), *O.CrumST* 56 and 60 identified in Till, *Erbrechtliche*, *passim*. The wills under consideration here elucidate a number of very interesting topics (e.g., Greek and Egyptian literacy, burial practices, the accordance and discordance of legal codes and legal practice, and continuity of administrative functions in the post-Arab conquest period).

97. Greek is frequently used for the invocation and date of Coptic contracts, e.g., *P.KRU* 70, 71, 77. For the relationship between Greek and Coptic language and scripts in Western Theban legal documents, see Israel Horowitz, "Structure of a Coptic Donation Contract" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1940), 16. The Arabic invocation survives from at least one text from the corpus dated to 750 C.E. (*P.KRU* 70).

98. For a treatment of formulae, see Till, *Erbrechtliche*, 61–68.

99. Contrary to impressions gleaned from monastic rules and canon law, documentary texts depict men and women with ascetic titles owning and administering property as early as the fourth century and the available evidence does not suggest that this practice changed markedly in later times. Just like their contemporaries, ascetics frequently transmitted property by contracts or other legal documents. Judge, "Fourth-Century Monasticism," 613–20; Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 298.

property inherited through biological families; however, extant wills dictated by monks living in the Theban Mountain describe the transmission of *topoi* to members of a spiritual family.

*Spiritual Families: "From our fathers according to God"*

When the names of both testator and heir are extant, we can determine the relationship between parties. Despite the confusion wrought by the Christian use of familial vocabulary to designate non-biological relationships in *unofficial* documents such as letters, legal texts usually reliably record biological families.<sup>100</sup> Many of the wills from Western Thebes distinguish spiritual from biological relationships with the adjective "holy" (ΟΥΑΔΒ) (e.g., "my holy father," *P.KRU* 75.11)<sup>101</sup> or the phrase "according to (ΚΑΤΑ) God" (e.g., "son according to God," *P.Mon.Epiph.* 87.2–3 or "fathers according to God," *P.KRU* 65.33). In addition to these cues, we can almost always be assured of the relationships between our monastic testators because they are identified by the patronym and (usually) matronym; these biological family members are not the same as the spiritual family members who are named as benefactors or beneficiaries of the wills.

In analyzing the vocabulary used to describe monastic space in wills, we have as a control contemporary wills from the same area with which to compare and contrast descriptions of space. Five wills concern (male) testators who are monks and whose primary heirs are other (male) monks (*P.Lond.* I 77, *P.KRU* 77, *P.Lyon*, *P.KRU* 65 and 75)<sup>102</sup>; one monk whose primary beneficiaries are his biological family (*P.KRU* 67); a testator designated only by his patronym who leaves his land to the Monastery of Phoibammon (*O.Crum.ST* 70); and seven testators whose primary beneficiaries are spouses or members of his (*P.KRU* 67, 71, 74) or her (*P.KRU* 66, 76, 68, 69) biological family.<sup>103</sup>

*Succession of the Monasteries of Phoibammon and Epiphanius and the Vocabulary of Space*

A single, extant will effects the disposition of the Monastery of Epiphanius to successive heirs (*P.KRU* 75).<sup>104</sup> Surviving in 152 lines of Coptic, it

100. Wilfong, *Women*, 70.

101. Compare the name of the biological father given in *P.KRU* 75.131.

102. For a discussion of the evidence for female ascetics in Western Thebes, see Wilfong, *Women*, 106–110.

103. The relationship between the (female) testator and her (male) heir in *P.KRU* 70 is unclear to me.

104. *P.KRU* 75, translated in *P.Mon.Epiph.*, appendix 3, 343–48.

recounts the passing of the property over four generations (from Epiphanius to Psan to Jacob and Elias to Stephen, *P.KRU* 75.10–15). The dating formula of the document is lost, but it was probably written in the second half of the seventh century C.E. In the will, “Jacob, son of David, the monk (ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ) and Elias the pious believer (ΠΙΣΤΟΣ), the son of Samuel, that are counted of the Kastrum of Jeme and that dwell upon its holy Mountain (ΤΟΟΥ)” (131–33) bequeath the property to “Stephen the most pious monk (ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ)” (62). As stated in the document, Elias is to inherit the *topos* from Jacob, but not knowing which one will predecease the other they make provision for a third man, Stephen, to take possession of the property (*P.KRU* 75.30–40).<sup>105</sup> The boundaries specified by the document give an excellent view of the topography in the seventh century and enabled Winlock and Crum to speculate concerning the limits of the community.<sup>106</sup>

We have desired with benevolent intent and (full) knowledge, respecting the dwelling places (ΜΑ ΝΩΠΕ), namely the caves (ΒΗΕ), that are at my, Jacob’s, disposal, according to the force (ΠΡΟΣ ΤΑΔΥΝΑΜΙΣ) of the two wills (ΔΙΑΘΗΚΑΙ) that had been drawn up for me by my holy father, Apa Psan—while he for his part, was owner (ΧΟΕΙΣ) thereof through the force of the will that had been drawn up for him by [his] holy father, Apa Epiphanius—those that I now give unto thee, Stephen. And my holy father Apa Psan, before Apa Elias ever dwelt with us, did write me the first will, making me owner of all the dwelling places (ΜΑ ΝΩΠΕ), namely the caves and the tower (ΠΥΡΡΟΣ), from the road that goes to Saint Phoibammon, to the road that goes to the cave of those whose remembrance is among the holy ones, Apa Abraham and Apa Ammonios, the men of Esne, and to the road of the valley (ΕΙΑ) and up to the hill (ΒΟΥΝΟΣ) that is above the said caves and tower. (9–20)

According to the will, the *topos* consists of ΜΑ ΝΩΠΕ (pl.), a generic enough term, meaning the “dwelling places.” When further clarifying information is added, we read that the dwelling places consist of the ΒΗΕ, translated here as “caves” and the ΠΥΡΡΟΣ, translated as “tower.”<sup>107</sup> I will return to the use of ΒΗΕ below, but we can note that the terms accord well

105. I do not believe Jacob and Elias hold the property jointly.

106. Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:27–28, pl. 2. I do not believe their hypothesis is the only option; the late antique topography of Western Thebes will probably be rewritten as more texts from the region continue to be published.

107. ΒΗΕ appears seven times in *P.KRU* 75; it is equated with “dwelling-places” three times (*P.KRU* 75.9–10, 40–45, 60–65). For ΠΥΡΡΟΣ, see Husson, *Oikia*, 1986, 248–51, and Schiller, “Family Archive,” 351. In relation to churches and monasteries, see Peter Grossmann, *Christliche Architektur in Ägypten* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 301–7.

with the archaeological remains of the converted tombs and the remains of two towers on the site.

Scholars have long recognized that four partially extant wills on papyrus effect the disposition of the Monastery of Phoibammon at Deir el-Bahri over the course of four generations.<sup>108</sup> The successive heirs of the Bishop Abraham (c. 540/50–610/20) are Victor I (c. 565/70–635/40), Peter (c. 605–675/80), Jacob (will made 695), and Victor II (appearing until 711/12).<sup>109</sup>

The first in the sequence is a will on papyrus written in Greek and dating to c. 610 (*P.Lond.* I 77). In it, Abraham, self-described as “Abraham, Bishop of Hermonthis and anchorite of the holy Mountain of Memnonion (ὄρος Μემνονίων), son of Sabinos of blessed memory (i.e., deceased), whose mother is Rebecca” (76) bequeathed his property to “Victor, the most pious priest (πρεσβύτερος) and monk (μονάζων), my disciple (μαθητής)” (29).<sup>110</sup> In addition to other property, probably in Hermonthis/Ermont,<sup>111</sup> Abraham explicitly wills:

Not only that, but also the holy *topos* which is under me, that of the prize-bearing martyr Abba Phoibammon, which lies in the aforesaid holy Mountain of Memnonion (ὄρος Μემνονίων), I leave to you in unhindered ownership, together with its venerable property, from the cheap kind to the costly, down to a cinder. I direct you, the aforementioned Victor, the most pious priest and monk, my disciple, after my death and forthwith are to enter upon the moderate property bequeathed by me to manage it and own it and be master of it, of all the goods bequeathed by me, all of them from the small to the least, down to one *iugerum* and one *assarion* and one *obol*, and whatever there happens to be of pottery and wooden and stone household utensils, even including the pure oratory together with its venerable property, from the cheap kind to the costly. (25–34)

108. Walter Till, *Datierung und Prosopographie der koptischen Urkunden aus Theben*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse 240 (Vienna: Kommissionsverlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1962), 236. Martin Krause, “Testamente der Äbte des Phoibammon-Klosters in Theben,” *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Abteilung Kairo* 25 (1969): 57–67.

109. Dates following Krause, “Testamente,” 66.

110. *P.Lond.* I 77 = *Chrest.Mitt.* 319. Translation in Leslie S. B. MacCoull, “Apa Abraham: Testament of Apa Abraham, Bishop of Hermonthis, for the Monastery of St. Phoibammon near Thebes, Egypt,” in *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents*, ed. John Philip Thomas, et al. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2000), 51–58.

111. All of the witnesses are of Hermonthis (*P.Lond.* I 77.80–88) and line 25–26 seems to signal a shift from the above-listed properties to the Monastery of Phoibammon; cf. *P.KRU* 57–59.

The holy *topos* of Phoibammon is transmitted in three additional extant wills (*P.KRU* 77, *P.Lyon*, *P.KRU* 65).<sup>112</sup> The last will in the sequence (*P.KRU* 65) survives in ninety-nine lines of Coptic and provides very specific vocabulary as to the description of the inherited property. Jacob, “the monk (ΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ) and superior (ΠΡΟΕΣΤΩΣ) of the holy *topos* of Apa Phoibammon on the Mountain of Jeme (ΤΟΟΥ ΝΕΧΗΝΕ), of the district of Ermont” (*P.KRU* 65.81–82) names as his beneficiary “brother Victor, son of the blessed (i.e., deceased) Theodoros” (45).<sup>113</sup> The will also handily reproduces the succession history of the *topos* (*P.KRU* 65.35–38). More importantly, for our purposes, this testament provides very specific vocabulary to describe the inherited property, which includes the Monastery of Phoibammon.

... concerning the holy *topos* and all its dwelling places (ΝΑ ΠΩΠΕ), namely its caves (ΒΗΡ) which are set for us up in the same Mountain (ΤΟΟΥ) by those who came before us, by our fathers according to (ΚΑΤΑ) God, through documents (ΕΓΓΡΑΦΟΝ) drawn up for use, our fathers to be commemorated for all time, the most blessed Apa Abraham, the bishop, and Apa Victor, priest and holy superior, the one who drew up his will (ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ) for the holy *topos* according to its force, and our brother, the most fortunate Apa Petros, the priest; all of whom are dead at the command of God . . . (32–37)

[Victor] shall have absolute power over the holy *topos* of Saint Phoibammon which is set up in the Mountain of Jeme, and everything in it, whether gold or silver or garment, or brass, or document (ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΙΟΝ) or book (ΣΩΜΕ) or cave (ΒΗΡ) or pit (ΨΟΚ) or tower (ΠΥΡΓΟΣ) or enclosure (ΠΕΡΙΟΧΗ) . . . (53–55)

Here we can note that the property includes foremost the holy *topos* of the Martyr Phoibammon, but the will also specifies its dwelling places. What these dwelling places consist of exactly is clarified by the noun ΒΗΡ, translated here as “caves” (32–37). Further details of the inhabited space (given in 53–55) include the ΨΟΚ (pits), ΠΥΡΓΟΣ (tower), and ΠΕΡΙΟΧΗ

112. For the relationship between the three, see Krause, “Testamente.” On the dating formulae of *P.KRU* 77 and its accordance with standard Byzantine practice, see Roger S. Bagnall and Klaus A. Worp, *Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt* (Boston: Brill, 2004), 271. To my knowledge there is no critical edition of *P.Lyon*, but a translation is given in Till, *Rechtsurkunden*, 145–48. Krause argues against Till’s identification of *P.KRU* 77 as a fragment of *P.Lyon* in “Testamente,” and determines that it constitutes a separate document altogether.

113. German translation in Till, *Erbrechtliche*, 152–58. English translation (given here) based on A. Arthur Schiller, “Coptic Wills, Translation and Commentary” (JD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1926), 26–32.



(enclosure), terms that accord well with the archaeological remains of the ancient rock-hewn chapels, tombs, and installations in and around the temple complex at Deir el-Bahri.<sup>114</sup>

The wills describe the inhabited ancient funerary architecture as dwelling places (ⲙⲏⲁ ⲛⲱⲱⲡⲓⲉ). They are not referred to by the usual vocabulary used to describe tombs, for example, in Greek τάφος or μνημεῖον or Coptic ⲙⲓⲁⲁⲓⲩ.<sup>115</sup> By doing so the authors or scribes of the wills surely would have indicated that these were, foremost, active cemeteries. As demonstrated above, the relationships vary between the monasteries and contemporary burials. In order to be as clear as possible, they are termed “dwelling places.” Unlike the literary texts concerning Elias and Pisentios, the wills do not explicitly seek to emphasize tomb habitation as an ascetic feat. But when further information is given, a more precise term, ⲃⲏⲃ, is used to describe the dwelling places; this reveals a measure of the way in which the authors and scribes of the wills understood these dwellings.

In order to understand the implications of the vocabulary used in the wills to describe the funerary architecture adapted to occupation, we first can turn to Coptic translations of the Bible where the meaning of the vocabulary in question is relatively secure. ⲃⲏⲃ is the Coptic word used most frequently to translate Greek σπήλαιον (“cave”), as for example the cleft in the rock in Jer 13.4.<sup>116</sup> It also translates Greek μάνδρα, an animal den or a nest of birds or insects. For example, in the Coptic translation of the Bible, it is used of the lion’s den in Nah 2.12 and a den of foxes in Matt 8.20 and Luke 9.58.<sup>117</sup> It is also a den of thieves, in Jer 7.11, or robbers, in Mark 11.17.

According to Walter Crum’s *Coptic Dictionary*, ⲃⲏⲃ is “confused” with another word, ⲃⲏ, in some Coptic recensions of the Bible.<sup>118</sup> ⲃⲏ is a grave, for example in Tob 8.9. According to Crum, ⲃⲏⲃ (“cave” or “den”) is

114. For ⲡⲓⲣⲓⲟⲥ, see n. 108 above. For ⲱⲱⲕ, see below.

115. For the use of τάφος in Coptic papyri, see Hans Förster, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Wörter in den koptischen dokumentarischen Texten* (New York: de Gruyter, 2002), 797. For the use of μνημεῖον, see Förster, *Wörterbuch*, 526 and the land sale *P.Flor.* 3.310 from the Hermopolite dated 425/435?; *O.Mich.* 2 is unprovenanced and dated by hand to the seventh century on propriety of removing tomb; *P.Mich.* inv. 3999 published by James Keenan, “A Christian Letter from the Michigan Collection,” *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 75 (1988): 267–71. I thank James Keenan for providing me with the last reference.

116. Crum, *Dictionary*, 28.

117. Michel Wilmet, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament sabidique* 2, CSCO 173 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1957), 37.

118. Crum, *Dictionary*, 28.



occasionally used where we might expect  $\text{BH}$  (“grave”). For example, in Matt 23.29: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous.” The reverse is true as well where  $\text{BH}$  is used where we might expect  $\text{BHR}$ , for example, in Nah 2.12  $\text{BH}$  is used of a lion’s den.

Instead of a mistake,  $\text{BHR}$  is a perfectly good translation of Matt 23.29, if, for example, you are a Christian in Egypt understanding the Bible in terms of what you see around you. Indeed,  $\text{BHR}$  and  $\text{BH}$  have the same root (the basic meaning of which is “opening” or “hole”) and both can have the meaning of “tomb” in earlier stages of the Egyptian language.<sup>119</sup> The fact that  $\text{BHR}$  and  $\text{BH}$  can function as equivalents in Coptic simply confirms the same ambiguity found in earlier phases of the language.<sup>120</sup>

Although not strictly equated with “dwelling places” in the same way as  $\text{BHR}$ , I should here note the meaning of  $\text{w}\omega\text{K}$  in the will of Jacob (*P.KRU* 65) concerning the disposition of the Monastery of Phoibammon. It is a Coptic noun based on the verb “to dig.”<sup>121</sup> It can mean “hole” (e.g., “But he who received the one talent went away and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money,” Matt 25.18). It is used with respect to a well in Num 21.18 and can have the meaning of a great depth (Eph 4.10) or designate the sea (e.g., Mic 7.19, Luke 5.4, and 2 Cor 11.25).<sup>122</sup> From these Coptic examples we can infer that  $\text{w}\omega\text{K}$  generally refers to a drop straight down. In demotic Egyptian, specifically in documents concerning the burial of mummies in the Theban Necropolis in the second century B.C.E.,  $\text{šq}$  is used of burial shafts, and I suspect that is what we are dealing with here.<sup>123</sup> The numerous first millennium B.C.E. burial

119. *Chicago Demotic Dictionary*, ed. Janet Johnson (Chicago: Oriental Institute Electronic Publications, 2001), <http://oi.uchicago.edu/OI/DEPT/PUB/SRC/CDD/CDD.html> (accessed March 15, 2005): B (02.1), 1–3.

120. Furthermore, if we remember that ancient Egyptian temples and tombs were usually covered in decoration, including farming, hunting, and offering scenes depicting animals, zoomorphic deities, and especially hieroglyphs—among the most recognizable of which were representations of animals—the use of the word  $\text{BHR}$  with respect to its meaning “animal den” becomes all the more appropriate. Dwight W. Young, “A Monastic Invetive against Egyptian Hieroglyphs,” in *Studies Presented to Hans Jakob Polotsky*, ed. Dwight W. Young (East Gloucester, MA: Pirtle & Polson, 1981), 356, note 6.

121. Crum, *Dictionary*, 555–56.

122. Michel Wilmet, *Concordance du Nouveau Testament sahidique* 2, CSCO 185 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CSCO, 1959), 1189.

123. *P.Choach.Survey* 3 and 17B.24 and 28 with discussion on 468. Jaroslav Cerny, *Coptic Etymological Dictionary* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 238, 239; W. Erichsen, *Demotisches Glossar* (Copenhagen: E. Munksgaard, 1954), 524,

shafts in the terraces of the Temple of Hatshepsut were perhaps in use by the Monastery's residents. At the Monastery of Epiphanius, which was more carefully excavated than the Monastery of Phoibammon, I have noted above the excavators' identification of an ancient burial shaft as an active part of the complex.<sup>124</sup>

### *Defining "Home"*

Recent work has called attention to the fluidity of early experiences of monasticism, especially with respect to its foundation in a domestic context.<sup>125</sup> What I have set out here both complements and complicates these discussions.<sup>126</sup> Monks living in the Theban Mountain used precisely the same legal means and strategies as their contemporaries to maintain their property within the "family." But where the monks lived and the vocabulary they used to describe their dwelling places differ significantly from their neighbors.

It is revealing to compare the terminology used in these wills to those of the monks' contemporaries living in Jeme/Memnoneia. In contrast to the descriptions of property in the Theban Mountain that use  $\text{ⲙⲙⲁ ⲛⲱⲱⲛⲓⲥ}$  (pl. "dwelling places"), the words used to describe habitation in Coptic wills concerning property in the town of Jeme are  $\text{ⲙⲓ}$  and, less frequently,  $\text{ⲟⲩⲕⲟⲥ}$  (both "house").<sup>127</sup> The will of the monk Jacob discussed above (*P.KRU* 65) provides an apt contrast between the house ( $\text{ⲙⲓ}$ ) his successor Victor left behind and the *topos* he shall enter, and in particular, what was at stake in such a physical and spiritual transition.

528. Crum interpreted  $\text{ⲱⲕ}$  as referring to a storage pit, e.g., one associated with Cell A at the Monastery of Epiphanius (Winlock and Crum, *Epiphanius*, 1:128); burial shafts of course could have been used for storage as well.

124. See note 47.

125. Philip Rousseau, "Blood-Relationships among Early Eastern Ascetics," *JTS* (1972): 135–44; Mary-Alice Talbot, "Byzantine Family and the Monastery," *DOP* 44 (1990): 119–30; Andrew Jacobs and Rebecca Krawiec, "Father Knows Best? Christian Families in the Age of Asceticism," *J ECS* 11 (2003): 257–63; Philip Rousseau, "Pious Household and the Virgin Chorus: Reflections on Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina*," *J ECS* (2005): 165–86; Kate Cooper, "Panoptical Household in Late Antiquity: Biological and Monastic," Annual Meeting of the North American Patristics Society, Loyola University Chicago, 3 June 2005.

126. See Sessa (this volume) for domestic space, i.e., the *cubiculum*, as a site of ascetic practice.

127. For parts of houses in Jeme, see Schiller, "Family Archive," 364–68. For archaeological plans and elevations of houses in Jeme, see Hölscher, *Medinet Habu* 5:45–51, pls. 29–31. The terms  $\text{ⲙⲙⲁ}$  and  $\text{ⲱⲕ}$  do not occur in the extant wills of the ascetics' lay contemporaries.

When I saw our brother Victor, son of the blessed [i.e., deceased] Theodoros, that, being a god-fearing believer, he *left his home* (ἡ) behind him and all that was his, and set out to execute that which is written in the Gospels to its most minute point; that he carried his cross and he followed the Lord; again, that he took it upon himself to be a monk, serving with us in everything, distinguishing himself in the life of piety, teaching the laity among us, thereupon, I, the humblest Jacob, approved our pious brother Victor . . . I command that Victor *shall enter into the holy topos of Saint Phoibammon*, the martyr, the holy one, whose holy name we first commemorated. (45–53, my italics)

Even in, or perhaps especially in, so formal a document type as wills, authors expressed a sense of place with a vocabulary that alerts us to the nuance allowed to such space. The inhabitants of the Monastery of Epiphanius and the Monastery of Phoibammon did not employ the usual language for tomb (τάφος, μνημεῖον, ἡθάλαγ) or home (οἶκος, ἡ), or even cell (κελλίον, ρι) to describe where they lived. Instead the authors of the wills had recourse to a technical, Egyptian vocabulary that specifically reflected the topography of their monumental landscape. The funerary connotations of the space are implicit, but they are not exploited to the degree that we find (and expect) in the literary sources.

## CONCLUSION

The range and abundance of sources from Western Thebes presents the opportunity to establish an historical methodology that takes advantage of multiple points of view. While exploiting the content of each source, we must nevertheless be aware of its limits. Perceptions were not always fixed; for example, in texts, the representation of a necropolis's monastic occupants can shift depending on the subject—the author of a saint's life, someone writing a letter, someone else writing a legal contract. Authors may express different perspectives depending on their audience, their occasion for writing, and the circumstances surrounding the writing. Through different sources (here, archaeological, literary, and papyrological) we may attempt to understand the complex, overlapping, and even dialectical relationship between the built environment and ascetic practice.<sup>128</sup> By recognizing a plurality of motivations for (or perhaps, explanations of) tomb habitation, we can draw a more nuanced picture of the practice.

In accordance with the function of this edifying literature, which was composed to inspire imitation of saintly conduct, the writers of *Lives*

128. I thank Kristina Sessa for helping me to better articulate this point.

emphasized tomb-habitation as an ascetic feat. For the purposes of identification and the prevention of future disputes, the authors of wills sought to describe a given property as carefully and accurately as possible. Like descriptions of space in the *Lives*, those in wills are not neutral, but informed by cultural norms and expectations.<sup>129</sup> The vocabulary authors employed demonstrates that monks living at the Monastery of Phoibamon and Monastery of Epiphanius recognized the earlier funerary function of the monuments, specifically of the rock-cut tombs and chapels (βηθε) and even the shafts (ὄρυκ) therein. The specialized vocabulary allowed for the ambiguous function of the monuments as dwelling places for the living and the dead. In this sense, the monuments once used to house the dead and secure a blessed afterlife were not only adapted and reused, but also re-imagined when they came to serve as homes and sites of ascetic practice for the Christian monastic living. This elision between the spaces for the living and the dead finds validation in early monastic literature where the ascetic ideal of *apatheia* (“passionlessness”) is often articulated in terms of “becoming dead.”<sup>130</sup>

Just as the colossal statue of Amenhotep III was earlier understood to represent the Greek mythological king Memnon and the area called after him the Memnoneia in Greek documents, so too Christians, surrounded with the ancient monuments of Western Thebes, continued to reuse and re-imagine the monumental landscape in accordance with shifting cultural paradigms. The “transforming” in the title of this paper is meant both in the passive voice—to suggest that natural and architectural landscapes *are* transformed by people that live in them—and in the active voice—that such monumental landscapes also play their own socializing role.

*Elisabeth R. O'Connell is a PhD candidate at University of California, Berkeley*

129. Thus, it would have been inappropriate to use τάφος, μνημεῖον, or ἡδραγ to describe where people lived.

130. The metaphor of the tomb was frequently used to express the ideal of *apatheia*: “if you do not become dead like those who are in a tomb, you will not be able to grasp [this saying].” *Apophthegmata patrum* 11 (PG 65). Translation, Benedicta Ward, *Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetic Collection*, Cistercian Studies Series 59 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), 140–41. See also *Apophthegmata patrum* Moses 11, 12; Moses to Poemen 1, 2. Thelma Thomas, *Late Antique Egyptian Funerary Sculpture: Images for this World and the Next* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 44.